

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002334

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ECUADOR'S INDIGENOUS: QUIET BUT CONFIDENT

11. (SBU) Summary: Battered by its early association with an unpopular government it helped install, bruised by open internal divisions, and hurt by a humiliatingly low turnout in fizzled national protests in June, Ecuadorian indigenous leaders might be expected to have low electoral expectations for upcoming municipal elections. In fact, some indigenous leaders defiantly claim the movement remains united and strengthened by its travails, and warns that they will fight against the Gutierrez government,s liberal economic orthodoxy and an FTA with the U.S. Indigenous leaders also warn they could yet be driven to "extremes" if conditions worsen. Our view is the indigenous movement, as the only force with proven capability to mobilize, remains vitally relevant to political stability in Ecuador and should not be counted out. End Summary.

In weakness, strength

12. (U) On August 17, PolCouns and PolOff met former FM Nina Pacari, whose indigenous party, Pachakutik, broke its alliance with President Gutierrez and left positions in his government a year ago. Pacari insisted that despite poor turnout during recent national protests and contrary to the opinion of many political analysts here, the break with the government and recent open divisions over whether to protest the Gutierrez government have not seriously damaged the indigenous movement. Instead, she believes the indigenous movement emerged strengthened and "consolidated" after Amazonian indigenous leaders were discredited and rejected by their base for supporting Gutierrez. Many of those leaders have now been replaced, according to Pacari. Pacari did acknowledge that the movement learned a costly lesson by participating in Gutierrez' government: that without controlling the Presidency itself, the movement could not achieve its goals.

13. (U) Pachakutik,s national coordinator, Guilberto Talahua, similarly claimed the indigenous movement is growing stronger, especially at the local levels. He agrees that their political bases are consolidated and stated that they haven't lost their credibility. Pacari said that the media wrongly assume the weakness of the movement. Instead, she believed the indigenous movement suffers from an "image" problem. Regarding the fizzled attempt at mobilization in June, she said that while some of the national leaders didn,t support it, the leaders at the lower levels reacted and rejected pro-Gutierrez indigenous leaders.

From Partners to Kingmakers

14. (SBU) Pacari was very critical of Gutierrez saying Gutierrez had committed worse offenses than former (corrupt) President Bucaram. However, the movement is not interested in getting rid of Gutierrez unless more "extreme" conditions arise. She said the Social Christian Party (PSC) is waiting for an opportune moment to get rid of Gutierrez and had sought to enlist the help of the indigenous movement; however, the indigenous are not interested in serving PSC interests. She said that by getting rid of Presidents Bucaram and Mahuad through protest the movement hat matured and now realizes "change for the sake of change" is not worth it unless there is someone better who can step in and respond to the historic moment. Today, she said, conditions are not right for an indigenous mobilization to oust the President. However, she warned, Gutierrez, "divide and rule" approach and neo-liberal policies could conceivably drive the country to just the "extremes" that could provoke popular reaction.

15. (SBU) Minister of Government Raul Baca, told the Ambassador on August 24 that despite the indigenous movement's substantive differences with GOE policy, he maintains an open door for dialogue with the indigenous. The GOE is very pleased that the indigenous movement has chosen to participate within the democratic electoral process despite its bitter exit from the Gutierrez government a year ago.

US Role Criticized

15. (SBU) Reacting to public pronouncements by the Ambassador, Pacari criticized the US distinction between

supporting the institutions of democracy versus President Gutierrez personally, saying that the two are inextricable. She believed the US was acting like an "big brother" telling Ecuador what form of democracy was best. She criticized Gutierrez for being "subservient" to the US on issues such as the FTA and said he would not fight for conditions favorable to Ecuador. Pacari believes that Ecuador is not ready for a FTA but claimed some personal credit for having led the indigenous movement from outright rejection of free trade to support for a ten-year moratorium to allow Ecuador to prepare for any FTA with any country.

No Worries About Elections -----

16. (U) Pacari said the indigenous movement is now focused on long-term goals and not worried about partisan electoral results. Pachackutik would participate in upcoming elections but were not suffering any "anguish" over the results. She also said they would focus on working at the local level. Talahua stated publicly that there has been and will be no rapprochement with anyone in the current Government.

Comment -----

17. (SBU) While the indigenous movement may not be as united as they were, their potential must not be discounted or underestimated. While Gutierrez has proven skillful at sowing division, the indigenous leaders are regrouping and in our view, retain the potential for civil disturbance if provoked. That said, Pacari's complacency about the upcoming municipal elections probably indicates confidence that the indigenous will retain or extend its representation in town halls where the indigenous are concentrated. Regardless, economic and political conditions in Ecuador have clearly not reached the "extremes" required to stir a slumbering indigenous movement.
KENNEY